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ABSTRACT

Methods of communication on the college campus are receiving more attention only to the extent that the college anxieties and problems are attributed to the lack of proper communication. Because colleges are expected to promote the free interchange of ideas, opinions, and information, more effective communication on the campuses can be expected. In 1971-72 a series of interviews was conducted to obtain opinions about the effectiveness of campus communication and methods of improving it. The attitudes which emerged were: first, improvement in communications was found to be the most significant need on campuses; second, although many suggestions for improvement were offered, the general conclusion was that there are no clear or easy solutions finally, concern was expressed about the lack of sensitivity and attention to communication problems observed among those with the knowledge and position to make improvements. (The author lists thirteen conclusions from an opinion survey relating to attitudes about campus communication.) (RN)

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IMPROVING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION: A CAMPUS QUANDARY

Jerry M. Anderson

Communication is the lifeline of a social system or organization. The success of organizations to accomplish functions and achieve goals is directly related to the effectiveness of their communication systems. Ineffective communication costs business, industry, government, and post secondary education billions of dollars each year and immeasurable morale problems.

Organizational theorists posit that the variety and amount of communication, and the degree of difficulty in evaluating a communication system, correlate closely with an organization's complexity of functions and often its size, and the rapidity and nature of change in both functions and size. Even in relatively stable periods the study of campus communication is difficult. For the smallest of colleges as well as megaversities are pluralistic social organizations with multiple functions, experiencing constant change, unique in role and mission, and misunderstood by many on the campus as well as the public. Each, however, is held together by and dependent upon human communication to function. The biological metaphor of UCLA Chancellor, Franklin Murphy, in commenting on the complexity and growth of the modern university, quoted in T. A. Harris' popular book, I'm OK--You're OK, seems perceptive.

> The preoccupation has been with the anatomy of the beast rather than its physiology. If the body gets ahead of the nervous system,

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> the animal gets incoordinate--the animal staggers sometimes. With the university we now have to create a nervous system to match the animal. It takes a sophisticated nervous system to deal with complexity, to carry messages between the differentiated organs.[1]

Harris, commenting on Murphy's metaphor states, "The function of the 'nervous system' of a university is the same as that in the human body--communication."[2]

In the past decade campus communication has been subjected to the severest of tests in attempting to respond to unprecedented public expectations of higher education, unparalleled growth and support accompanied by stress, and now a decline in growth with relative austerity and accountability.

During this decade there have been signs of an increasing awareness of the importance of communication to the campus. One sign has been the signal response tendency to attribute one or more communication deficiencies as the cause of nearly every campus anxiety. And, even in the absence of any causal analysis, this seems justifiable in many instances. At the same time, concerted efforts to evaluate and improve campus communication have been disappointing.

This discussion and report of research emphasizes internal campus communication. But, the dynamic, interactive process of communication in any organization is not limited by geographical boundaries or outer limits of organizational charts. The campus

is not isolated. There is a continuing and reciprocal relationship between on and off-campus events communicated via various sources and channels modifying attitudes and behavior both within and outside the "walls of academe" with direct impact on institutional ethos, and operation.

Time Spent Communicating

The "average" American spends 70 to 75 percent of waking hours in verbal communication behavior, listening, speaking, reading and writing, in that order.[3] The percentage is higher on campus since human interaction and communication transactions are vital to learning and other activities. Recent models of participatory governance and shared decision making add to communication activity. If nonverbal communication, "body language," is added, time spent in communicating is substantially increased.

The amount of time consumed by those in higher education administration has not been researched, but it is probably at least equal to that of business management personnel who are estimated to engage in communication 90 percent of their work day, three-quarters of it in oral face-to-face communication.[4]

The Nature of Campus Communication

Communication on campus, as in society, occurs in various ways and may be characterized by various terms. Communication may be intentional, unintentional, formal, informal, official, unofficial, horizontal, vertical, verbal, nonverbal, written, oral, and unresponsive as well as responsive.

Illustrative of written communication on the campus are various authorized and unauthorized publications, plus memos,

letters, and newsletters, originating from and directed to groups, sub-groups and individuals of the campus community, including faculty, staff, and students, transmitted by personal, mass, and a variety of other dissemination and transmission methods and channels. Other forms of written communication include meeting minutes and reports from governance groups, committees, divisions, departments, centers and other units, plus forms, surveys, various reports, bulletin boards and information centers.

Oral communication on campus occurs in dyadic, small group, and public meetings. The telephone, intercom systems, oral-visual media in the form of closed circuit television, campus radio stations, and carrousel recordings extend this partial list. In addition, the oral communications of the corridor, water fountain, lounge, and coffee klatch are important channels and also generate vast amounts of grist for the rumor mill.

People also communicate through various social events, retreats, sit-ins, demonstrations, marches, and strikes. Teaching-learning by traditional and non-traditional methods and models and learning resource centers are vital components in the campus communication network.

The reasons humans communicate are infinite. They do so for social, psychological, personal, and professional reasons, to seek clarity, convey ideas, stir and release emotions, modify behavior, direct action, legitimize actions, resolve conflicts, make judgments and decisions, solve problems, establish rapport and empathy, and entertain. People also communicate to express hostility or assure others of no hostile intent.

As an environment which seeks to foster free, open, and responsible expression of ideas and information, the expectation for effective communication is probably higher on the campus than in almost any other social institution. This expectation challenges all members of the community who collectively share responsibility for the quality of communication, but especially those in administration. The contemporary administrator must possess insight into the communication process and demonstrate essential skills, both as a source and receiver.

Effective Communication

Effective communication stimulates interaction and results in transactions of feelings, values, meanings, and messages between sources and receivers. Human communication involves who transmits what in what channel to whom with what effect.

Communication is a process which includes a source or sender, meaning or message, channel for transmission, and receiver who decodes the meaning. In intentional communication, the source encodes by analyzing the intended receiver and circumstances involved to decide what is to be sent and how. Feedback is a factor to be considered in all communication, and in intentional communication its existence or lack of it provides some audit for the source to interpret the extent to which the intended meaning was attended to by the receiver and the transaction completed.

An effective campus communication system must be understood, credible, and utilized. Its functional efficiency may be measured by the extent to which it facilitates interaction, and beyond that, results in accurate communication transaction.

Attitudes About Campus Communication

This summary of attitudes about campus communication is the result of opinion research. During the 1971-72 academic year, formal interviews set by prior appointments and with the topic of the interview, "your views about campus communication," announced in advance were conducted with over 90 people, ranging in length from 15 to 90 minutes. The research population consisted of a randomly selected semi-stratified sampling of persons directly affiliated or closely identified with the campus. Interviewees included administrators, faculty, students, staff, alumni, and trustees, representing over 30 post-secondary institutions of various size and mission, public and private, two and four-year, graduate and undergraduate, and from several states. The largest subset of the interview population represented four-year universities and colleges.

Beyond the 1971-72 research, the cumulative input of two decades of observation and experience in higher education as an undergraduate and graduate student and assistant, faculty member with responsibilities including travel to campuses across the nation, department chairman, academic administrator in central administration, communication consultant and participant in numerous communication and education conferences add to this analysis. Discussions during this time with communication scholars and members of related disciplines from at least 500 institutions about interpersonal and organizational campus communication and study of related literature and research add insight and also intensify concern about the campus communication quandary.

The 1971-72 opinion research followed an interview format designed to be open-ended to encourage respondents to call upon personal experience and ventilate feelings. The experience from these interviews suggests an effective way to uncover concerns of a campus population is to probe into communication attitudes, for the personal experiences volunteered provided useful insight into issues and anxieties.

Two questions formed the basis for interviews, except in a few instances where a more structured questioning approach was necessitated to elicit more extended responses. Those two questions: From your perspective and experiences, how effective is communication on this campus? What, if anything, would you do to improve it?

Three general attitudes clearly emerged. (1) The need for improved campus communication is among the most significant and pressing problems. When asked why, most answered that the functional operation of the campus was dependent upon communication effectiveness and it could be much improved, and internal effectiveness as perceived by those outside the campus would determine the level of future support. (2) Recommendations for improvement were multiple, usually incomplete in development, and concluded with the statement that no clear solutions existed. (3) Concern was expressed about the lack of sensitivity and attention to communication problems by those with the expertise to improve the situation and by others in positions to effect change. Several respondents viewed those in a position to effect change, in most cases meaning the administration, as remiss by

not encouraging those with expertise to make a communication evaluation. Those with the expertise were criticized for lacking incentive in applying it to the campus to improve communication. While not surprising, these attitudes were revealing.

Other conclusions about campus communication from the opinions expressed and experiences volunteered include these. (1) The intensity of desire to improve communication corresponded with the amount of concern for what was usually expressed as "the erosion of a sense of campus community." (2) The intensity of concern for increased communication did not vary substantially with size or complexity of campus mission; however, faculty of longest tenure in institutions experiencing most rapid growth and change reminisced more about the "good old days when people across the campus knew each other" and also felt they were aware of the most important information and actions on a daily basis. (3) The greater the perceived stress from an issue or issues, the more intensive was the call for improved communication as a preventative or curative remedy. (4) The ultimate responsibility for campus communication rests with the administration. (5) The more authoratarian an administrator or administration in behavior the greater the need for shared information, especially expressed by faculty. (6) The population who are or identify themselves in administrative roles share the frustration of other members of the campus on how to improve total communication; the group expressing greatest sensitivity and frustration to communication deficiencies included major academic officers and deans. (7) The problem of communication overload and insensitivity to timing

and duration variables was expressed by some faculty and especially department chairmen, who noted dissemination of information came in clusters. "Unreasonable" deadlines for return of materials needing preparation, and for reactions to proposed policies, were counter to informed responses. Advance notice for effective implementation of policies was not sufficient. (8) The feeling of "alienation by communication denial"--communication underload--was expressed by most interviewees, especially middle level administrative support staff in service offices who felt bypassed. (9) The opinions of several staff reflected they felt a lack of confidence and betrayal of trust in them by supervi[illegible] due to excessive surveillance of their work and pre and post-auditing of communications for which they perceived themselves as the responsible originating source. (10) The feeling of communication denial and concern for message distortion were evident by criticism of traditional approaches to information processing through the classical-hierarchical organizational model tending to cast administration as management, faculty as employees, and students as consumers in the vertical flow of communication from the top down. Distortion by filtering agents in the flow was a concern. The model was further criticized because information access provided a basis of power and influence. On collective bargaining campuses less concern was expressed about the classical model by faculty favoring collective bargaining, perhaps because of a perceived influence role through negotiations, special conferences and other provisions, but students seemed more concerned because they lacked negotiation influence.

Faculty opposed to collective bargaining were critical of the adversarial relationship polarizing the campus and were highly critical of what they called "the myth of clearer communication" from formalized contract relationships and closure of continuing communication.

Three other conclusions from this attitudinal research warrant special reporting.

(11) The changing models of governance and decision making concerned several in terms of the consumption of time and frustration with the amount of communication activity involved in simply deciding "who decides," resulting in unclear decisions and "politicizing" the campus at the expense of academic endeavors.

(12) The group expressing little or no concern about communication consisted of approximately 20 percent of the sample, mostly students and faculty, in that order, who stated in various ways their lack of interest in the internal affairs of the campus, including communication, and the desire to go about "their thing." The concern of this group was that the increasing emphasis on community participation in internal affairs put pressure upon them to participate and intruded on what they really came to the campus to do. Many faculty viewed campus "political" participation becoming an increasingly important criterion in personnel decisions for promotion, tenure and salary, sublimating teaching and research. This group felt that the campus politicians get the rewards and patronage because they have visibility with the reward-makers, even when their academic endeavors are grossly substandard.

(13) The interviewees most distrustful of the administration, and most unhappy with administrative communication behavior, especially lack of disclosure, expressed opinions remindful of the administrative rating scale presumably invented in jest by a quality control engineer employed by a major automobile manufacturer which listed the following topics: "Talks with God; talks with angels; talks to himself; argues with himself; loses arguments with himself."

These attitudes reflect the pluralistic and complex nature of the campus and the quandary faced in improving campus communication. The desire for improvement in communication seems apparent, level of expectancy high, but proposals limited. Perhaps more importantly, these attitudes reflect the range of causes of communication breakdown, which are as many in number as there are potential channels and variant beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals and groups who serve as both sources and receivers.

Major Causes for Breakdowns

Major causes singularly and in combination include ambiguity in behavior in the use of verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, perceived and actual deliberate misrepresentation or withholding of information, factors relating to organizational size, complexity and distance, and factors of trust and believability. In addition, breakdowns result from difficulties arising from not knowing or understanding or agreeing, filtering sources intervening in the flow of communication causing distortion by inattention and selective perception, and above all because

meanings are in people. Frustration from communication overload, information underload and alienation by communication denial, problems in timing and coordinating release of meanings and messages and in feedback requests are common causes of breakdowns and also evident in campus communication systems.

Some Breakthroughs Evident and Needed

Breakthroughs, improvements in the climate and practice of communication, gain less attention and are more difficult to identify and generalize than breakdowns. Breakthroughs gain less attention because of the particular attitudinal inherency or mentality in academe which presupposes all problems lend to solution when subjected to critical evaluation, even when evaluation has been limited. Moreover, the campus as an environment fostering criticism tends to surface rather than cover its failures more than other social institutions. Breakthroughs gain less attention in times of stress, like those experienced by the campus, as failures tend to subordinate successes. Some observable breakthroughs have occurred improving both the climate for and practice of internal communication in general and on particular campuses.

The increased sensitization of the campus from recent experiences with more attention to and greater desire for communication and some evidence of it actually happening is both a breakthrough and requisite to future improvements. Since researchers conclude that as the number of communications increases so does the probability of a perception of trust, and since the restoration of a trust relationship is of high priority on campus,

the signs are encouraging.[5] Some of the accountability pressures from within and outside leading to increased communication, however, may not be those which the campus community would have chosen.

Yet, these pressures have resulted not only in more communication but in some cases better communication and provided the potential for greater campus cohesiveness by the need to share information and seek broader based input. For instance, the new emphasis on management by objectives has resulted in greater community-wide input in systematic longer range planning. Performance based objectives in learning has encouraged greater interaction of faculty, students and administration in developing new learning approaches, with specialists talking more with other specialists within disciplines and cross disciplinary efforts beginning to show. The breakdown of traditional structural models built to facilitate message flow through a hierarchical power structure has been another advance and lessened vertical and increased horizontal communication and experimentation with new channels and opening up of old ones long under used, even if some channel clogging is apparent at the moment. Both formal and informal approaches to professional negotiations by several component groups have forced more communication, albeit competitive in nature and for strategic reasons often selective, incomplete, inaccurate and sometimes dishonest, and forced more input and information access for some groups previously excluded due to hierarchical prejudices. While more communication does not mean more effective communication or the fact people are still

communicating too little, blunderingly, missing what others say, hearing but failing to understand, or hearing and understanding too well, or communicating past each other,[6] there is at least evidence of quantitative breakthroughs.

There is also evidence that administrators are showing greater insight and making greater effort to be skilled in and accepting roles as facilitating agents for effective communication, which the attitude research previously cited indicated is an expectation. Communication competency is a substantial factor in the rise and fall of the personal credibility of any administrator.

More research on campus communication and attempts to apply studies of other organizations are increasing.[7] There is yet considerable incongruence between the efforts and results of investigation and continuing need for improved communication. The vast amount of research on student culture and more recently on faculty culture,[8] as well as those on academic governance and decision making, provide related useful information.[9]

The efforts on some campuses in experimenting with new approaches, methods and techniques, some of which may be perceived as "gimmickry," in improving communication need to be noted. Information clearinghouses in various forms have emerged in an attempt to avoid the overload problem, lessen duplication of information, provide consistent intervals of dissemination through consistent channels, and with color coding and other attention devices increase both communication efficiency and sources attending better to those communications received. Efforts to be more

receiver oriented in analyzing audiences and turn-around-time for information return when requested have improved, but have a long way to go. These attempts at coordination have also lessened costs. Use of available electronic media long overlooked, including such new technological advances as compressed television, is encouraging. Such a simple matter as providing informational announcements on closed circuit television between classes has proven to be effective The use of telephone answering services in offices during after hours, and as a message dissemination system for people to call and hear important recorded messages, or for opinion polling purposes on campus issues, has also proven helpful. The assignment of people to campus switchboards around the clock, plus the work of volunteer groups manning phones to hear and help with problems, has had a humanizing result. The search for efficiency measures to emancipate administrators and support staff from their offices to meet people in their own environment is ongoing and necessary.

Catalogues and bulletins and other information sources need to be written with the sensitivity to readability, and are in some cases. Information dissemination centers located at various points on campus containing publications and other information for readier access are proving helpful. Departments or divisions, especially in large institutions, should be encouraged to develop internal newsletters distributed at regular intervals with attention to information of special interest to their constituency, but coordinated with campus-wide mass distributed information. These unit and campus-wide print items should be made available

at various information access points keeping intercommunication among units open.

Better judgment could be shown in using the telephone more often when things do not need to be part of a written record and in multiple carbon copies. Letters could be shortened. Bulletin boards could be keptup to date and used more extensively. The coordination and some consolidation of the minutes of various governance groups and committees need special attention. Meetings need to be planned better in advance and determinations made which could lead to lesser numbers spending lesser time. Audiences need to be alerted and better prepared for changes in policy or changes to be considered and allowed an opportunity for input; "surprises" provide counter attitudinal reactions and add to low campus morale. Cooling off periods, no matter what the pressure from special interest groups, on issues which do not require urgent attention should be considered so that rational analysis replaces emotional response and "brinksmanship" decision making. The less vocal and aggressive on campus should not be forgotten in the dissemination of information.

The breakthroughs being attempted and those possible could provide an endless list, many obvious and long overdue. What is needed more than anything else is some systematic evaluation, frequently referred to as auditing, of the campus communication system and sub-systems.

Auditing and Evaluation

To determine what ought to be, it is first necessary to determine and evaluate what is. Auditing really means monitoring and appraising the system. The prediction of John Gardner and Alvin Toffler that organizations of the future will be constantly changing to meet new problems adds to the challenge to develop ways and means of auditing communication. A variety of approaches is possible.

A common auditing approach is "flow tracing," by examining the individual components in dynamic relationships of a sampling of communication messages at intervals in the basic communication process. Another approach seeks to determine cost efficiency by analyzing actual communication costs in priority of organizational needs and then systematizing communication production and management accordingly. Emphasis here is placed on the responsibility of organizational management for the maintenance of an effective communication system.

Another approach at both minimizing cost and maximizing the data that can be gathered considers message diffusion variables: structure, load, rate of message flow, extent of message distortion, amount of redundancy, efficiency of the message channels, and functions messages were intended to serve. This message diffusion approach has considerable adaptability in gathering and analyzing data, including cost factors, about the communication system's performance. It is administered by having key respondents record their communication behavior with trained observers doing the same and a comparison made, followed by a

tracing of the steps taken by a message in its diffusion through the organization. This model goes beyond flow tracing.

Other specific techniques to assess communication include use of retention of message measures, disparity scores, measures of readability in written communication and instant intelligibility in oral communication, rumor transmission analysis, and several ways of measuring network effectiveness. At the same time, the audit itself needs evaluation to assess how attitude and opinion change is affected by the administration of it, and to what extent doing it contaminates results, usually done through pre and post questionnaire methods.

It is possible to audit and evaluate the communication of a campus or divisions of it, and the alternative methods and combinations are numerous. Most colleges and universities have the expertise right on campus to undertake some kind of communication audit. In some cases it may be desirable to use only members of the campus community to conduct the audit because of their insight into the institutional style and situational variables. In most it seems desirable to call in outside auditors for reasons of objectivity. The "golden mean" is perhaps a mixed team consisting of both inside and outside auditors, or whatever sources will provide the necessary expertise, objectivity, and credibility to elicit the cooperation needed.

Will the Quandary Be Resolved?

Breakdowns will always exist but recent breakthroughs provide encouragement. The need to generate more research and evaluation of an ongoing nature on campus communication should be a high

priority.

Perhaps the most accurate answer to the question of will the quandary be resolved, was provided by an interviewee with many years of teaching and administrative experience currently holding a high level administrative position in a multiversity who was deeply concerned about campus communication and had spent considerable time in attempts to improve it. He observed: "Perfect campus communication is a goal to be sought, but one you should never expect to attain."

FOOTNOTES

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[1]Thomas A. Harris, I'm OK--You're OK: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 255.

[2]Ibid.

[3]See, for example, David K. Berlow, The Process of Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), p. 1., and Raymond S. Ross, Speech Communication Fundamentals and Practice, second edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 1.

[4]C. S. Goetzinger and M. A. Valentine, "Communication Channels, Media, Directional Flow and Attitudes in an Academic Community," Journal of Communication, March, 1961, pp. 23-26.

[5]Otto F. Bauer, "Student Trust at Berkeley," Educational Record, Fall 1971, pp. 361-67; David T. Burhans, Jr., "The Experimental Study of Interpersonal Trust," Western Speech, Winter 1973, pp. 2-12; M. Deutsch, "Trust and Suspicion," Journal of Conflict Resolution, 2, 1958, pp. 265-279; S. S. Komorita and John Mechling, "The Trial and Reconciliation in a Two-Person Game," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, September 1967, pp. 349-53; James L. Loomis, "Communication, the Development of Trust and Cooperative Behavior," Human Relations, November

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[6]Irving J. Lee, Customs and Crises in Communication (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1954), page xi.

[7]Donald D. Dedmon, "A Comparison of University and Business Communication Practices," The Journal of Communication, September 1970, pp. 311-15; Gerald M. Goldhaber, "Communication at the University," Western Speech Journal, XXXVI, 1972, pp. 169-180; F. W. Hefferlin and Phillips, Information Services for Academic Administration (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1971); Phillip K. Tompkins and Elaine Vanden Bout Anderson, Communication Crisis at Kent State (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1971).

[8]Jerry G. Gaff and Robert C. Wilson, "The Teaching Environment," AAUP Bulletin, December 1971, pp. 475-93; Nevitt Sanford and Mervin Freedman, The Wright Institute Report, Central Michigan University, December 13, 1971, unpublished study.

[9]See, for example, Archie R. Dykes, Faculty Participation in Academic Decision Making (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education Monograph, 1968), pp. 37-42.